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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: CONGRESSMEN DISCUSS POSSIBLE
COLLABORATIONS WITH MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

REF: ABUJA 1548

11. This is an action message. Please see para 12.

12. Summary. Three Members of Congress visiting Nigeria under the auspices of a public diplomacy program met July 4 with the Minister and Deputy Minister of Agriculture. They expressed interest in pursuing collaborative ventures with Nigeria in the agricultural sector, particularly in post harvest management and processing. Minister Bello welcomed the interest and promised to provide the Congressmen with a written description of Nigeria's problems, such as crop loss.

Bello looked forward to his visit to the U.S. where he hopes to meet with the Secretary of Agriculture, land grant colleges, and private sector representatives. The Agriculture Minister's meeting with the Congressmen was brokered by President Obasanjo to revitalize bilateral cooperation and assistance from the United States. End Summary.

13. At a sidebar during the Embassy's Independence Day reception, Congressmen James Clyburn (D, SC), Bennie Thompson (D, MS), and Earl Hilliard (D, AL) met with Minister of Agriculture Adamu Bello and the Minister of State for Agriculture. The Congressional meeting with the Minister was actually brokered by President Obasanjo who met with the Congressmen during a breakfast meeting earlier that day. Ambassador Jeter, USAID Mission Director Hobgood, Public Affairs Counselor Bishop and EconOff (notetaker) also attended. The three Members of Congress were in Nigeria under the auspices of a public diplomacy speaker series, a program intended to strengthen linkages between the National Assembly and U.S. Congress.

14. Thompson opened the meeting by explaining to Minister of Agriculture Adamu Bello that all three of the Congressmen came from rural areas with land grant colleges. Thompson explained that land grant colleges receive federal funds to conduct research and teach in the agricultural sciences. Thompson encouraged Nigeria to focus on the agricultural sector in its efforts to diversify the economy into non-oil sectors. Thompson related to the Minister that his visit to farms in Kaduna State impressed upon him the extreme disorganization that pervades Nigeria's agricultural sector, exacerbated by the lack of processing or preservation facilities. The Congressman stated that the colleges in his district would be pleased to work with the Ministry on rectifying these deficiencies.

15. Hilliard said that all three Congressmen were members of the Congressional Black Caucus, which was interested in establishing stronger relationships with West Africa. Hilliard compared Nigeria's importance in Africa with the United States' importance in the Americas. Clyburn agreed and noted that in his district (Florence, South Carolina) there is a mango processing company that might be interested in a collaborative venture with a Nigerian company.

16. Minister Bello stressed the relevance of agriculture to the lives of most Nigerians; 70 percent of Nigerians are occupied with agriculture production, he said. He agreed with Thompson's observation that the system is deficient; up to 50 percent of every crop is lost because of the lack of preservation techniques and processing. The Minister commented that seasonal variations have an adverse impact on price stability. Mangoes, for example, will sell for 10 to the dollar part of the year and only 2 to the dollar the rest of the year. He said that the agricultural situation is so bad that "it would have been declared a national emergency, but it has been with us all the while." Bello agreed that what Nigeria needed was processing capacity to prevent these tremendous post-harvest losses. He welcomed foreign expertise in this area.

17. The Minister moved directly into a discussion of how to put these ideas into action. He mentioned his upcoming visit to the United States (Reftel) and asked whether he might meet with the Congressmen again in Washington. The Minister also expressed interest in meeting with the land grant colleges and private sector companies; the Congressmen committed to try to set up meetings with some of the former.

18. Deputy Minister of Agriculture Chief Chris Agbodu commented that the Ministry has had years of discussion on ways to improve agricultural production and profits. What is needed now, he said, is action on specific things, such as those the Congressmen were suggesting. He pointed to opportunities in cassava, of which 35 million metric tons are produced annually, where nearly 50 percent is lost due to the absence of preservation technologies.

19. USAID Director Hobgood noted that his agency would be able to offer assistance in bringing companies to Nigeria and introducing them to interested private sector companies and farmers. He stressed the important role of the GON to create an appropriate policy environment without involving itself directly in private sector collaborations.

110. Thompson asked the Minister to put in writing the problems Nigeria is experiencing with post harvest management, seasonal variations, and cattle. Ambassador Jeter summarized what Minister Bello's interests appeared to be for his visit to Washington: a meeting with the Secretary of Agriculture (per reftel), visit with land grant college representatives, private sector producers and processors, and sellers of agricultural technology, especially in the areas of post harvest preservation. The Congressmen suggested the Minister visit Tuskegee University, Alcorn State University, South Carolina State, Morehouse College and ABCUS.

111. Comment. In their meeting with Minister Bello, the Congressmen were alluding to the Agriculture Bill, which has passed the House and Senate (in different versions) and will soon go to conference committee. Congressman Clyburn said that he intended to insert wording in the bill to provide money for the "1890 Colleges" (the historically black land grant colleges, created in the 1890 amendment to the Morrill Act of 1863) for developing cooperative extension programs in West Africa ("or just for Nigeria, if we can"). Clyburn averred, therefore, that money for ties between the 1890 Colleges and Nigeria can be funded through the Agriculture Bill, rather than through Education or Foreign Operations. The Congressman's intent appeared to be to provide funding for the 1890 Colleges to set up exchange programs with counterpart schools in Nigeria, aiming to enhance farmer extension services. End Comment.

112. Action request: Embassy requests the Department, in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture and appropriate Congressional staffers, to prepare meetings as suggested above in Para 10. Ambassador Jeter received a letter from Minister Bello on July 9 requesting meetings for the dates of July 23-27.
Jeter